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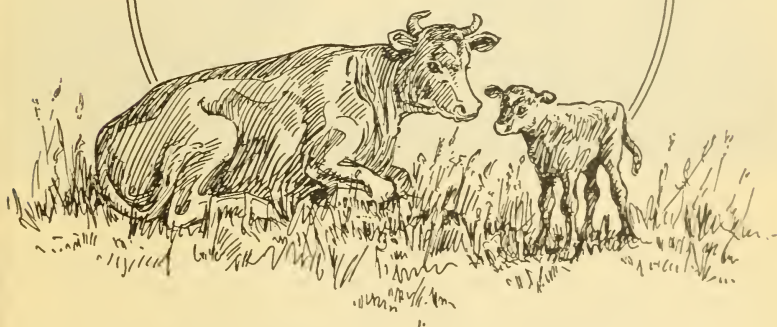
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CARE of THE DAIRY COW

*at calving
time*



LEAFLET
NUMBER 10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Issued January, 1928. Revised June, 1930

CARE OF THE DAIRY COW AT CALVING TIME

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The cow about to freshen should be cared for and fed in such a way that she will calve easily and normally, recover rapidly from the effects of calving, and start her lactation period in good health. Proper management at this time means more living calves, fewer sick cows, and better chances for a longer period of greater milk and butterfat production.

Care Before Calving

Take care that the cow due to freshen soon is not injured by slipping on stable floors or on ice, by crowding through doorways and at the water tank, or by mounting other cows that may be in

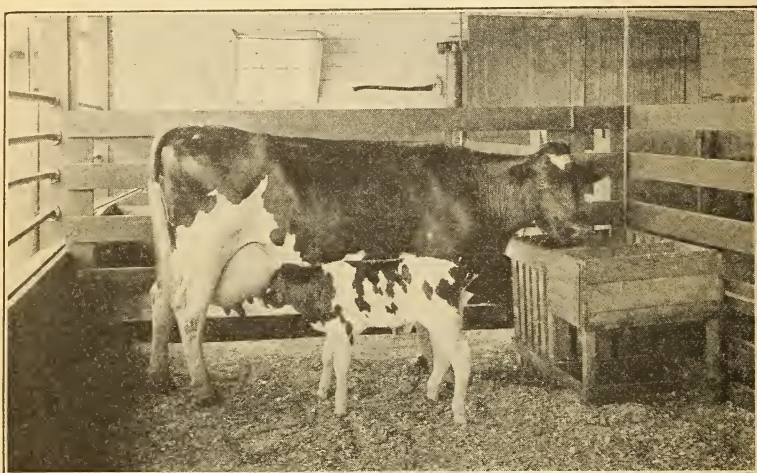


FIGURE 1.—Suitable quarters for the cow at calving time. The stall is bedded with shavings

heat. Separate the cow from the rest of the herd several days before the calf is due. Place her in a roomy box stall that has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected by removing all manure, by scraping and scrubbing the floor and walls, and by spraying them with a good disinfectant. Provide a box stall that is free from drafts and keep it well bedded with straw, shavings, or other material so the cow will be comfortable. By the time the calf is dropped she will be accustomed to her new surroundings.

The cow needs exercise at this time. In winter, when the weather is not too cold or the ground too slippery, she may be turned out in a protected yard and allowed to exercise each day. In summer a small pasture, conveniently located so the cow and calf may be given the proper care and attention, makes an ideal calving place.

It is well to stanchion the heifers with the milking herd for two or three months before calving. Brush them gently and handle them every day, to accustom them to the attendant, thus making them gentler and easier to milk.

Feeding Before Calving

The cow that has been dry for six weeks to two months and has been fed grain during this period, should be in good flesh at calving time. Several days before calving, the quantity of silage and hay may be reduced slightly and the grain cut down to 3 or 4 pounds daily. Feed cooling, laxative feeds, such as a mixture of ground oats, wheat bran, and linseed meal. The drinking water should not be too cold. For several hours before calving, feed the cow very little hay or silage. A warm bran mash would be very beneficial. If the bowels do not seem to be laxative enough, give her a ½-pound dose of Epsom salt.

Care During Calving

At the first signs of calving, do not allow the cow to be disturbed. Watch her condition, however, from time to time. After she has labored an hour or two, have an examination made by an experienced person to determine whether the calf is in normal position, which is nose and front feet foremost with the front feet alongside the head. Usually the calf is in this position, and the cow is able to expel it without much difficulty. If the calf is not in this position, however, it can sometimes be pushed back into the womb and turned so that it may be presented normally. If it is evident, after two or three hours of straining, that the cow is going to calve with difficulty, steps should be taken to help her. To make sure that the cow will not be injured in handling, have a qualified veterinarian or an experienced person care for her at this time.

Care of the Newborn Calf

Give the calf attention as soon as it arrives. Sometimes a slimy membrane covers its nose. If membrane covers the nose, remove it so the calf can breathe easily. Usually the cow will dry the calf by licking it vigorously. If she does not do so, dry the calf with burlap, straw, or other suitable material. Soon the calf will attempt to rise, and in half an hour it will be nursing. If it is weak and unable to stand and nurse, hold it to the cow's udder. Give the calf the first milk (colostrum), which is very beneficial in cleaning out its system and in aiding the organs to start functioning. To guard against navel infection, apply tincture of iodine to the calf's navel soon after birth. If a long cord is left attached to the navel, cut it off an inch from the body before applying the iodine.¹

Care After Calving

Just after calving, the cow is in a weakened condition, and her digestive system is sluggish. She needs little nourishment but should be kept warm and comfortable. It is a good practice to give her lukewarm water to drink, and to follow this with a warm bran mash if she is disposed to eat. If the barn is at all chilly, a blanket will help to keep her warm. Thus cared for, she should be able to expel the afterbirth normally within a few hours after she has calved. If it is necessary to leave the cow alone, halter and tie her so she can not reach the afterbirth after it has been expelled. Remove it from the stall as soon as possible.

¹ Further information on the care of the calf is given in Leaflet 20, Care of the Dairy Calf.

If the afterbirth is not expelled naturally within the first 48 hours, its retention usually is due to inflammation of the womb. Retained afterbirth should be dealt with by a qualified veterinarian, for it may be followed by, or induce, barrenness.

Milking

The time of the first milking will depend on the condition of the udder. Usually it will not be necessary to milk the cow for at least 12 hours after she has calved, and then only part of the milk should be drawn. It is a good plan to leave some of the milk in the udder at each milking for at least two days after calving. This may help in the prevention of milk fever.

Milk Fever

Milk fever generally attacks mature cows and usually occurs within two days after calving, if it does occur. It may be recognized by a staggering gait and lack of control of the hind legs. As the disease progresses the cow goes down in a stupor, lying in a natural position, except that the head is usually turned toward the flank. Later, paralysis may become general, and then the cow lies on her side.

Treatment should be given promptly. First, cleanse the ends of the teats with a disinfectant solution. Then inflate the quarters of the udder with sterile air by means of a special milk-fever outfit which has been cleaned and sterilized just before it is used. Tie the teats with broad tapes to prevent the air from escaping. At the end of three hours remove these tapes and massage the teats. Usually one treatment is sufficient, but occasionally a second treatment is required. This treatment is simple, easy to administer, and is very effective. The milk-fever outfit may be purchased from almost any dairy or veterinary supply house.

Congested Udder

If the cow is at all feverish or the udder hard and congested, give a 1-pound dose of Epsom salt. If this does not have the desired effect, give a second dose two days later. Leaving the calf with the cow longer than the usual one or two days may help some. The calf's frequent sucking and massaging of the cow's udder seem to aid in lessening the congestion. In persistent cases, milk the udder three or four times daily, then massage it thoroughly and apply camphorated oil to the affected quarters. Keep the cow in the barn and away from drafts.

Feeding After Calving

After two days, if everything is proceeding normally, the cow may be placed in the stable with the milking herd. Give her all the hay she will eat and a little silage or other succulent feed. Feed about 4 pounds of grain, laxative in nature, at first, and increase the amount gradually. Too much grain at this time is likely to cause digestive disturbances and hinder the reduction of swelling in the udder. Three weeks or more should be taken to get high-producing cows on full feed, whereas medium and low producers may be fed their full allowance in somewhat less time than that.

